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SUBJECT: FRENCH MFA ON EU, RUSSIA, IRAN, AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Mark Pekala, Reasons 1.4(b),(d).

¶1. (C/NF) SUMMARY: At an October 5 lunch with visiting EUR DAS for Western Europe and Press and Public Diplomacy Spencer Boyer, key MFA officials provided an update of French thinking on a number of issues: the GOF hopes that the Czechs will ratify the Lisbon Treaty soon and that the U.S. will engage more with ESDP; the French remain skeptical about the potential for concrete improvements in NATO-Russia relations despite better atmospherics; a "lack of strong U.S. leadership" on Iran has compelled the French to take a forward-leaning position; and the GOF wants to maintain close coordination with the United States on the Middle East. END SUMMARY.

French MFA Officials Positive on Lisbon

¶2. (C/NF) French MFA officials expressed their satisfaction with the results of the Irish referendum on the Lisbon Treaty and their hope that full ratification will come soon. Laurent Delahousse, Deputy Director for the European Union, said member states would start ratcheting up the pressure on the Czechs, starting with a meeting of EU officials with Czech Prime Minister Jan Fischer in Brussels on October 7. Nevertheless, the timeline for a Czech ratification remains unclear, as it depends in part on a judicial process. Alexandre Vulic, Advisor for EU External Relations to State Secretary for European Affairs Pierre Lellouche, added that Lellouche and National Assembly Deputy and Europe expert Pierre Muscovici had a meeting on next steps with the Czech Ambassador in Paris, who was hopeful but asked for consideration for the internal political dynamic in the Czech Republic. On a related note, both Delahousse and Vulic were cautious about a possible bid by PM Francois Fillon for the new European Council Presidency position, saying they thought Fillon had claimed he was not interested.

Hopeful about U.S.-EU Cooperation on ESDP

¶3. (C/NF) Vulic said one positive result of ratifying Lisbon might be more opportunities for "political" cooperation between the United States and the EU, especially on ESDP, and asked if the United States would be willing to work more closely with the EU even when an operation is launched under the auspices of ESDP because the USG does not want to contribute troops. Jean-Hugues Simon-Michel, MFA Deputy Director for Strategic Affairs, cited counterpiracy operations off the Horn of Africa as a good example of U.S.-EU operational cooperation, while Vulic added that further U.S.-EU cooperation on ESDP could also help convince Turkey to be more flexible on ESDP-NATO issues.

Skeptical on NATO-Russia Relations

14. (C/NF) The October 1 trip by FM Bernard Kouchner and Defense Minister Herve Morin to Moscow for a "2-plus-2" meeting with their Russian counterparts focused on international affairs, not bilateral relations, said MFA Deputy Director for Continental Europe Edouard Beslay. He said Russia wanted to build on France's reintegration into NATO's military command, and seemed genuinely interested in improving relations with NATO. The Russians did not want to be viewed as a threat, and hoped to be involved in the drafting of a new Strategic Concept. Simon-Michel added that this would be a thorny issue, since Allies have very different views of Russia. He said the challenge would be to move from NATO-Russia goodwill to concrete action, adding that NATO had already maintained certain activities not of central importance to the Alliance, such as counterterrorism exercises, merely as an excuse to have areas of concrete cooperation with Russia. Vulic added that while the atmosphere may have changed, Allies need to be clear on what is expected from the Russians.

Asking for U.S. Leadership on Iran

15. (C/NF) France is waiting for U.S. "leadership" on Iran, according to Simon-Michel. Responding to a comment that France seemed to be in front of the United States on Iran, Simon-Michel sharply interjected that this was because "there is no U.S. leadership." He added that the United States seemed to have come to an early conclusion about disarmament, but needed to focus on nonproliferation as well, warning that an Iranian nuclear weapon would spark a disastrous regional

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arms race. Simon-Michel said France had not deliberately chosen to have the strongest position vis a vis Iran among Western allies, and that he wished the United States would move closer to the French view. While we are on the same page strategically and may finally be coming together tactically, France would have liked to see a specific mention of Iran at the G8 conference in July and in the resolution from the September 24 UN Security Council nuclear summit. Simon-Michel's French colleagues looked down and visibly fidgeted while he was expressing these views.

Looking for Further Consultation on the Middle East

16. (C/NF) France is looking for enhanced U.S. consultation on Middle East issues, said DAS for the Near East Ludovic Pouille. Specifically, he called for U.S. engagement with the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), underlining French hopes that the UfM might be useful within the overall context of Middle East peace talks. Pouille also said the United States and France should consult on "what we can do with" the Forum for the Future and the Middle East Partnership Initiative. Pouille said the GOF was very happy with consultations with Special Envoy George Mitchell and NEA A/S Jeffrey Feltman, and encouraged further visits. He added that French officials had noticed elements in President Obama's Cairo speech that expressed a view of secularism different from the French interpretation and that these ideas merited further consultation. He told poloff separately that the October 3-4 trip to Damascus by Elysee Diplomatic Advisor Jean-David Levitte and Secretary General Claude Gueant was useful in some measure because the GOF's relationship with Syria is now normalized and unextraordinary, but offered no further detail about the content of the meetings.

17. (U) DAS Boyer has cleared this cable.
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